

# How are Western holidays interpreted and celebrated in Japan?

## - Christmas, Valentine's Day, Halloween -

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“We no longer see these holidays as Western holidays”  
- Keiichiro Horii (columnist in Japanese cultural changes) -

### JAPANESE CULTURE

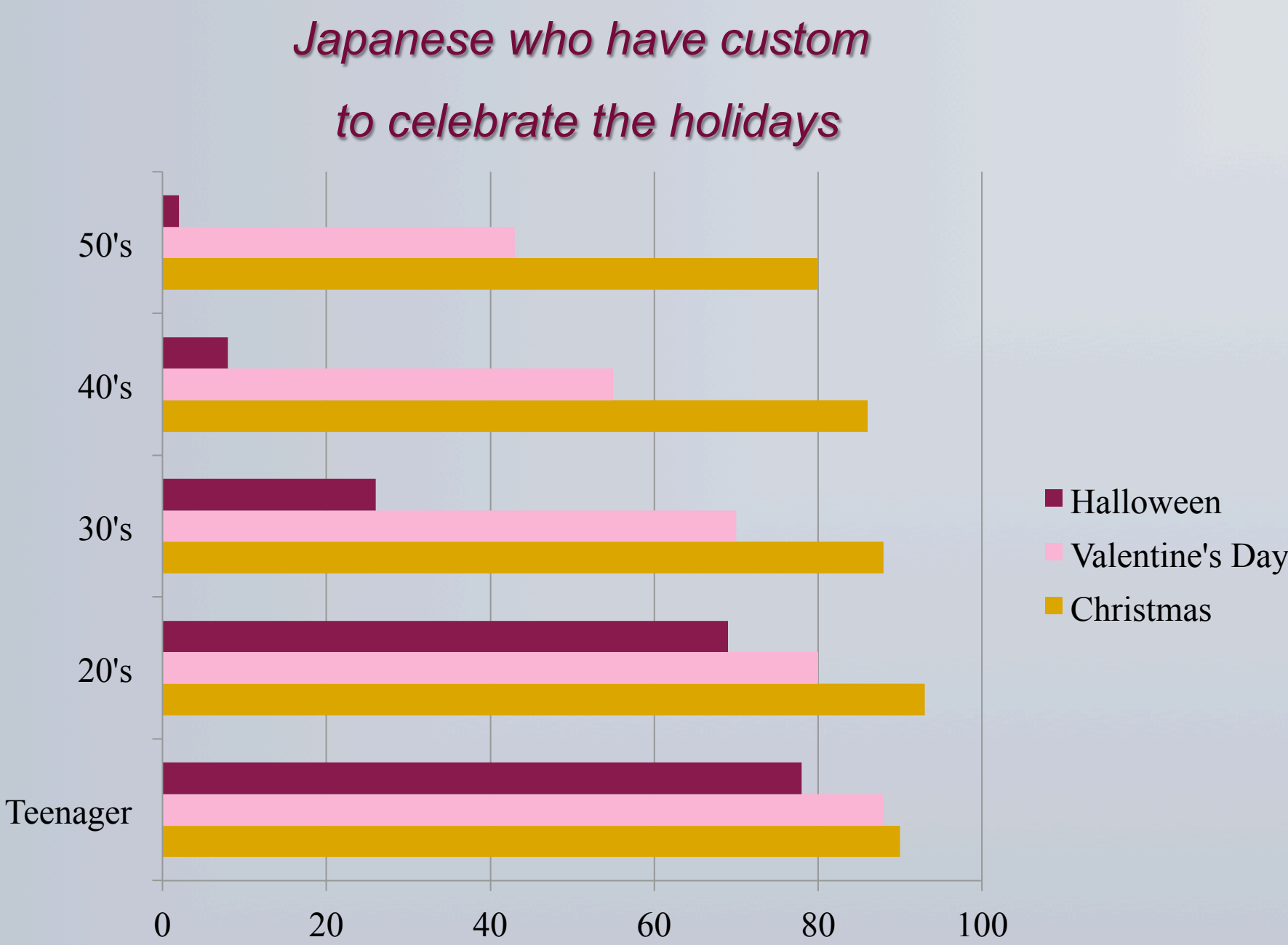
• **GIFT CULTURE**

Gift giving in Japan is deeply rooted in tradition with gifts given not only for social occasions, but also for social obligations -- gifts given when indebted to others, both family and business. The emphasis is on the act of giving rather than the gift itself. The value of the gift is of less importance than the presentation and thoughtfulness in which it is presented.

In Japan, gifts are given on anniversaries, weddings, births, graduations, and housewarmings. Children's achievements are also celebrated with gifts. Though traditionally gifts are not given for birthdays or Christmas, this is becoming a modern Japan gift giving custom. Gifts or Omiyage (souvenirs) given to family, friends and co-workers are expected upon returning from a trip. After receiving a gift, the Japanese send a "thank you" gift called an O-kaeshi. These thank you gifts are common for illnesses, funerals, weddings and births. The value of this gift usually equals half the value of the original gift.

• **POP CULTURE**

Japanese popular culture encompasses the modern popular culture of Japan. It includes Japanese cinema, cuisine, television programs, anime, manga and music, all of which retain older artistic and literary traditions, and many of their themes and styles of presentation can be traced to traditional art forms. Contemporary forms of popular culture, much like the traditional forms, are not only forms of entertainment but also aspects to distinguish contemporary Japan from the rest of the modern world. There is a large industry of music, films, and the products of a huge comic book industry, among other forms of entertainment. Game centers, bowling alleys, and karaoke parlors are well-known hangout places for teens while older people may play shogi or go in specialized parlors. After the end of the US occupation of Japan in 1952, Japanese popular culture has been deeply influenced by American media. However, rather than being dominated by American products, Japan has localized these influences by imitating and partly appropriating the originals.



Each holiday has some features

	CHRISTMAS	VALENTINE'S DAY	HALLOWEEN
Gift culture	○	○	
Pop culture			○
Love	○	○	
Individuality			○
Age-counters			○
Women's empower		○	
Isolation	○		

### CHRISTMAS

- In Edo period, missionaries spread Christianity and Christmas to Japan. Christianity was forbidden afterwards, and only the culture that gifted presents in the day of Christmas penetrated people. The religious aspect of Christmas has disappeared before the Meiji period. The Christianity banned by the isolation policy of the Edo period and the gift culture peculiar to the Japanese have a great influence on the Christmas in Japan today.
- Originally in Japan, there is a year-end party where familiar people gather at the end of the year and enjoy delicious food and drinks. Christmas doubled as a year-end party after the religious aspects are gone.
- Christmas gifts custom made commercial. Lovers have a nice date better than usual, and it is a day to give each other a nice present. In families with children, it is a day to eat treats and cakes. People spend the day differently depending on generation.



### HALLOWEEN

- Halloween in Japan is an event for adults to enjoy. Cosplay is becoming a very big culture as one of the Japanese pop culture, but it is not something that anyone can easily enjoy at any time because it sometimes involves passive images(geek). Halloween in Japan is an opportunity for anyone to enjoy cosplay. Halloween is relatively new and popular event in Japan because most of Halloween event in Japan started after 2000. Japanese people recognize that Christmas is the day for lovers, and Halloween is a day for himself/herself. It is interesting that Halloween event is on extension line of cosplay culture in Japanese idea. It is generally popular only among young people and it has spread rapidly because it is strongly related to Japanese pop culture(Cosplay).
- The Halloween market and event are expanding every year, but people have anxiety to dirt and noise in the town.



### VALENTINE'S DAY

- Valentine's day in Japan started with a confectionery company trying to increase sales of chocolate by advertisement.
- Valentine 's day is a day for women to give their feelings and chocolate to whom they like. There is “White Day” in March 14th that is a day for “thank you gift”, so men who got chocolate in valentine’s day give some gifts to the women.
- The history of Valentine’s Day in Japan is well-related to social advancement history of women. The purchase of chocolate helps symbolize the independency of women.
- There are an increasing number of women who exchange chocolate among friends and purchase chocolate as a reward for themselves.



### WEB PROPOSAL

- I intend to use the research in the creation of a website to inform people how and why are Western holidays interpreted and celebrated in Japan.



• Student learning Japanese  
“As language and culture are deeply tied, I believe it is very useful for my language study.”

- JSO member

“I like the social aspects in Japan. It is good to know!”

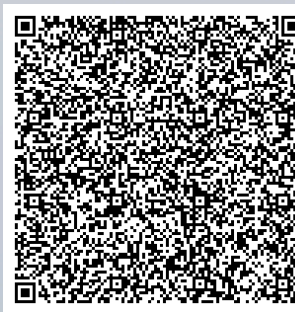
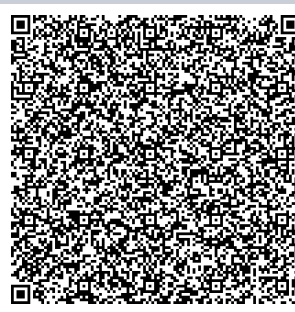


• Businessman working with Japanese companies  
“It is important for business to understand that Western culture can have different meaning in Japanese society.”

- So far, there are not seen to be completed website that discusses the relation between Japanese traditional culture, pop culture and Western holidays. My website shows some videos of festivals that helps people understand how are the holidays celebrated.
- To get the website out in open, I will create social media accounts, like Twitter, Instagram, LINE, YouTube, and Facebook.
- To see how successful this website is will be seeing the number of hits the website gets.



### REFERENCES



Stony Brook University